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UNCLAS MANAMA 000128

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP DJONES, NEA/PPD DMACINNES AND MQUINN

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TAGS: [OIIP](#) [PREL](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [BA](#)

SUBJECT: DCM RETURNS FROM NAJAF AND ENGAGES BAHRAINI
AUDIENCES ON IRAQ

1. To further post's goal of convincing Bahraini audiences about U.S. goals in Iraq, PAS Manama arranged tailored media events for DCM Ford, who recently returned to Bahrain from a three month rotation as the CPA Governorate Coordinator in Najaf. Bahrain is a small island and many Embassy contacts knew the DCM was in Najaf. They were curious about his experiences there. Post took advantage of their interest by programming him with top media contacts. He also visited political salons (majlises) to renew his acquaintances and highlight U.S. work in Iraq. Notably, younger Bahrainis were keenly interested in first-hand observations of the changes in Iraq since the war. (Comment: These majlises are noticeably less hostile than they were last spring. End Comment.)

2. Over an informal breakfast with the editors-in-chief of Bahrain's daily newspapers January 13, DCM spoke first-hand about the situation in Najaf. He responded to pointed questions about the pace of reconstruction and the steps that need to be taken before the CPA hands over sovereignty to Iraqis in the summer. He also highlighted opportunities for Bahraini businesses in rebuilding Iraq. At a reception in the DCMR with Bahraini journalists and columnists January 14, Ford responded to numerous questions, and considerable doubts, about the daily lives of Iraqis and U.S. hopes for a democratic Iraq.

3. Ford's outreach activities paid off. "Akhbar Al Khaleej," a daily Arabic newspaper which strongly opposed the war and continues to regularly question U.S. intentions in Iraq, finally carried a positive article on January 14. Its headline: "The American Deputy Ambassador: We are Committed to Hand Over a Democratic and Just Regime to the Iraqis." The editor-in-chief thanked the PAO profusely for inviting him to "chat" with Ford, and he stressed that his newspaper is not "anti-American" and that he welcomes such dialogues. Another leading Arabic daily, al-Wasat, carried on January 14 a prominent story on an inside page reporting DCM's remarks about the potential for Bahraini companies in Iraq and the progress CPA has made setting up more representative local government.

4. Comment: First hand knowledge about Iraq, combined with Arabic language skills, made DCM a particularly effective interlocutor with Bahraini media and groups. When our young Arab-American APAO returns from a five month rotation in Iraq next month, we plan to program him at the University of Bahrain and with youth groups. Post recommends that other posts consider programming officers upon return from similar rotations in Iraq.

NEUMANN